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United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme
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Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

Performance of the programme of work and budget, including implementation of the resolutions of the Environment Assembly

Proposal of the Executive Director on the revision of the United Nations Environment Programme 2011 marine and coastal strategy, pursuant to resolution 2/10 on oceans and seas

Summary

The United Nations Environment Programme and its collaborating centres carried out an online survey of the effectiveness of the Environment Programme 2011 marine and coastal strategy. Further to the survey, the Environment Programme entered into a revision of the strategy.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report provides information on the implementation of resolution 2/10 on oceans and seas, together with recommendations and suggested action.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 2/10

2. In paragraph 17 of its resolution 2/10, the United Nations Environment Assembly requested the Executive Director to assess the effectiveness of the United Nations Environment Programme 2011 marine and coastal strategy and, on the basis of that assessment, submit a proposal for its updating, revision or replacement for consideration by the Environment Assembly at its next session.

3. The Environment Programme carried out a survey of the effectiveness of the 2011 strategy and developed a revised strategy based on the survey. The proposed framework of a revised strategy is set out in the annex to the present document.

III. Recommendations and suggested action

4. The United Nations Environment Assembly is invited to review the framework strategy and may request the Executive Director to continue its development so that a full-fledged strategy proposal is submitted to the Environment Assembly.

Annex

Oceans and seas

1. The influence of oceans and seas on our life on earth is enormous. However, marine and coastal ecosystems are changing rapidly due to increasing human pressure for resources combined with the impact of our actions, such as land-based pollution, acidification and climate change. However, oceans and seas are at the core of countries' economies and are critical for food security, building resilience and mitigating climate change. Oceans and seas have the potential to spur economic growth in a number of sectors, to contribute to eradicating poverty, to enhance social inclusion, to improve human welfare and to create new opportunities for employment and decent work for all.

2. The objective of the United Nations Environment Programme's strategic direction on oceans and seas is to secure concrete action for sustaining healthy marine and coastal ecosystems. The potential of sustainable blue growth to securing access to food and energy for future generations, as well as to contributing to poverty reduction and sustained livelihoods, is critical. The Environment Programme will implement action to maintain marine and coastal ecosystem services to ensure sustained livelihoods and food and energy provisions.

Transformative leadership

3. There is a need for enhanced leadership on oceans and increased capability to implement and monitor the ocean-related targets and indicators set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Environment Programme aims to step up its engagement at the global level and to take on a transformative leadership partnership with key stakeholders and leaders from business, civil society, the media, the science community and Governments to drive change and set out a course for action guided by Sustainable Development Goal 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The Environment Programme aims to be a platform for engagement under the priority areas set out below with a view to supporting member States in the implementation, inspiration and showcasing of best practices.

Priority 1: Regional ocean governance

4. The Regional Seas Programme, established in 1974 and now consisting of 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans covering more than 150 countries, is a core building block for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. There is a need to strengthen collaboration with other regional bodies and to enhance initiatives such as the regional fisheries bodies and large marine ecosystem projects to advance the implementation of the ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals. The use of the Regional Seas Programme as an implementation platform for the areas listed below will enhance awareness of the challenges and opportunities of the national and regional actions for seas close to countries. Working in new regional partnership with various stakeholders from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, Governments and academia can nurture innovation and ambitious changes. The Environment Programme is an active observer of marine-related activities of the Arctic Council, in particular through the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment working group and the new Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation. The working group under the Arctic Council is a central part of the Regional Seas Programme network.

5. Integrated area-based management is a key instrument to implementing an ecosystem approach. Through the Regional Seas Programme, the Environment Programme and its partners will channel its support to member States by providing practical solutions and policy advice on marine spatial planning, marine protected areas and integrated coastal zone management customized to local, national and regional settings. Its approaches will incorporate economic, social and environment information to support decision-making.

Priority 2: Enhanced partnerships to prevent pollution of the marine environment

6. The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, adopted in 1995 and whose secretariat is hosted by the Environment Programme, includes multi-stakeholder partnerships focusing on nutrient management, marine litter and wastewater. Although the Global Programme of Action undergoes an intergovernmental review process every five years, it needs to be reenergized and adapt to the next generations of pollutants and stakeholder engagement. A number of important global developments have taken place since the last Intergovernmental Review Meeting, held in 2012, that have serious implications for the future direction of the Global Programme of Action:

(a) In 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which land-based marine pollution issues are addressed in targets 6.3 and 14.1;

(b) The United Nations Environment Assembly, the main governing body of the Environment Programme, was established in 2012 with a universal membership of United Nations Member States. The expected outcomes of the third session, to be held in Nairobi from 4 to 6 December 2017 under the theme of pollution, will include resolutions and action towards a pollution-free planet that may require a specific implementation mechanism;

(c) The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have continued to provide regional support to further global responses, addressing land-based pollution through their associated regional protocols ratified by an increasing number of countries;

7. Furthermore, the Global Programme of Action needs to take account of emerging issues that may require attention, including ocean acidification and sargassum seaweed. Closer collaboration with other relevant United Nations bodies and external stakeholders is necessary; for example, the private sector has a clear role and is an essential part of solutions. The International Maritime Organization and the shipping industry are additional examples of areas in which further consideration is needed on how to work closely with partners to tackle marine pollution.

8. It is expected that a political declaration on pollution will be adopted by the Environment Assembly at its third session, along with resolutions that support specific actions, including marine and coastal pollution. The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and its current three partnerships should be fit for purpose and fully aligned and integrated with the outcome of the third session of the Environment Assembly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the pollution protocols under the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans.

Cross-cutting themes

(a) The economy of the ocean: enhancing sustainable blue economy

9. Investing in healthy oceans and coastal management provides good returns and contributes to national economies and development, while contributing to a healthy marine environment. By mapping marine ecosystems, assessing and valuating marine ecosystems, an ecosystem-based approach towards the blue economy can be developed (also referred to as sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystems for economic growth). The "economics of the ocean" concept will be more relevant in a private sector discourse.

10. The blue economy will also be used when working with low-income countries, including small island developing States, blue carbon and forests. The Environment Assembly adopted resolution 2/4 on the role, functions and modalities for Environment Programme implementation of the SAMOA Pathway as a means of facilitating achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is linked to sustainable tourism. The Environment Programme will also continue to address vulnerability, focusing on impacts on livelihoods, poverty reduction and blue economic growth. A core part of developing a sustainable blue economy involves creating innovative business models based on the sustainable use of natural resources.

(b) Ocean and climate change

11. The Environment Programme will further develop and promote ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation (blue carbon) as key approaches to building climate change resilience. Future work towards implementation of the Paris Agreement will include support to countries in development and implementation of national adaptation plans and emission reduction schemes, working with the Climate Technology Centre. Blue carbon approaches will be integral to ocean-based economy frameworks and investment strategies.

(c) Coral reefs

12. The Environment Programme is working with the secretariat of the International Coral Reef Initiative to further develop the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. The Environment Programme has initiated preparation of an outreach campaign on coral reefs, to be rolled out in 2018. The Global Coral Reef Partnership of the Environment Programme and Regional Seas Programme develops tools and supports regional and national measures that build climate change resilience. The Environment Programme will take the lead in the global community to drive the work on coral reefs through Communities of Ocean Action as a follow-up to the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, held in New York from 5 to 9 June 2017.

(d) Communication: ocean literacy

13. The aim is to communicate stories and create a passion for commitment and change by enhancing knowledge about the linkages between healthy oceans and life on land. A central part of increasing ocean literacy is to both educate and communicate the value of marine resources in economic, social and cultural terms. The Environment Programme has long-standing experience with nature-based economics and envisages a study on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity for oceans. The CleanSeas global campaign on marine litter was launched in February 2017 with a focus on non-recoverable plastics and single-use plastics. A core component in communication is to align our work with key players to drive the agenda forward.